

at this time. I hope we can get this done. I do not want to have just a vote on cloture. I think probably on this we could do it, but I think it is the wrong message that we cannot work out some amendments.

I see no reason that we have to do immigration on this bill; that is what E-Verify is about. I don't know how many more times we have to pound on ACORN. We have voted on that many times already. I think we are being reasonable.

I think Senator BUNNING, if he would look at the amendment we have suggested, which is out of the Finance Committee—and it is my understanding it is bipartisan—which would cover net operating losses, then Senator BUNNING would get everything he asked for under his amendment. It is just where the money would come from. It is all paid for.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 3548

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, again, the two consent agreements have a universe of six amendments on my friend's side and eight on our side. We are willing to agree to short time agreements on each amendment. I am fairly confident in saying it would not take much more floor time, if any, to pursue the underlying bill, which almost everyone supports, in a form that would encompass the opportunity to offer eight amendments.

With that, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to immediate consideration of H.R. 3548, which was received from the House, and that the following amendments be the only amendments in order:

Reid-Baucus substitute; Baucus side-by-side amendment for housing tax credit; Isakson-Dodd, home buyer tax credit; Johanns, alternative substitute; Vitter, ACORN; Bennett-Thune, TARP sunset; Corker-Warner, TARP; Sessions, E-Verify; Bunning, operating losses.

I further ask unanimous consent that following the disposition of the above-listed amendments, the bill, as amended, be read the third time, and the Senate proceed to a vote on passage.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object, frankly, I think it is unfortunate that we could not just vote on extending the unemployment benefits for the masses in our country who are out of work and are desperate. There are thousands and thousands of people who are waiting for us to get something done.

The issues that are brought up are issues we can deal with, but it should not be at the expense of wasting all this time. We have been trying to get this done—the unemployment extension—for weeks. With each day that goes by more people in America have less money. If we want to talk about stimulating the economy, try giving a

check to somebody who is out of work. They spend that money.

I will continue to try to be fair and reasonable with the Republicans, who are so bound and determined to slow us up on everything, including checks for people who are desperate for work. I hope we don't come to a point where we have to just vote on extending unemployment benefits. That would be unfortunate. The proposals they have made are unnecessary, but I am trying to go above and beyond what is fair. We are willing to step way in the other direction just to move things along. But to vote on immigration matters and on ACORN, which we have done so many times, is only dilatory.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as my good friend, the majority leader, knows, the easiest way to move it along is with a time agreement, as opposed to going through the normal processes in the Senate. I have a feeling the majority leader wants to object to my consent.

Mr. REID. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the reason for having a consent agreement is to expedite the process, do it more quickly. We have two competing consent agreements: one with six amendments and one with eight. Either one would move the process along. We will continue to talk about it and, hopefully, we can get this worked out in a way that is mutually satisfactory.

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Mr. REID. Mr. President, these are not competing consent agreements. This is an effort to try to get something the American people should have—the most unfortunate people who have been out of work for an extended period of time—which is unemployment compensation checks.

I ask unanimous consent that we pass H.R. 3548 with no amendments; that is, benefits that will go to people who have been out of work for an extended period of time. This is an act to amend the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008 to provide for the temporary availability of certain additional emergency unemployment compensation. I hope we can move forward with that.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, we have just had a discussion about two consent agreements, each of which has a very limited number of amendments. There is no reason we cannot reach an agreement to take up the underlying bill, with a limited number of amendments, and finish the bill expeditiously.

Simply cutting people off and not allowing any amendments at all is not an acceptable approach. Therefore, I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is not a question of having no amendments. We agreed to have six. I think that is unnecessary. My friends in the minority are continuing to slow-walk unemployment compensation, while people are desperate for these small checks that they get to keep the rent paid and pay for groceries for their kids. I think we should do this today, get it done now.

I understand there is an objection. I think it is unfortunate.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Well, Mr. President, the only thing that would slow this down would not be to reach a consent agreement. We will continue to talk to the majority leader and, hopefully, we can reach an agreement for a reasonable amount of amendments.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There will now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

THE PUBLIC OPTION

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I will let the majority leader make his own announcements, but there are a lot of discussions in the news media today that in a short period of time he intends to hold a press conference announcing that he will push ahead with the so-called public option in the health care legislation—one that currently includes an opt-out provision for States.

I don't know whether he intends to do that or whether he doesn't. He is entitled to make his own announcement, as I said. But it provides a good opportunity to talk about what we mean by a public option in health care, or a government-run health care plan, putting government in the health care business, and how it already works, and how it might work if States were allowed to opt out.

The reason it is easy to talk about this is—and the former Governor of Virginia, who is presiding, knows this as well as I do, and maybe better because he has been Governor more recently—we already have in existence in the United States today a public option health insurance program which States may opt out of. It is called Medicaid.

Medicaid is the largest government-run program we have in health care—even larger than Medicare. Medicare, for older people, has about 40 million persons who depend on it. Medicaid,